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## THE FOLK-LORE OF HERBALS.

ELEANOUR SINCLAIR ROHDE.

THE subject of the paper I have been asked to read this evening is so vast that it is impossible to deal with it in any detail, and one can only touch on its broadest outlines. The Anglo-Saxon manuscripts on herbs alone are mines of valuable information to the student of folk-lore, and it is with these I propose to begin. The most important of these manuscripts are the famous Leech Book of Bald (Brit. Mus. MS. Reg. 12), generally believed to have been written during Alfred's reign and possibly by some one who was a personal friend of the King, the Saxon translation of the *Herbarium Apuleius* (Brit. Mus. Cottonian MSS. Vitellius C. 111), the *Lacnunga* (Brit. Mus. Harleian MS. 585), containing the remarkable alliterative lay in praise of herbs—supposed to have been written in the tenth century but probably a copy of a much older MS.—and the Saxon translation of the ΙΙΕΠΙ ΔΙΔΑΞΕΩΝ (Brit. Mus. Harleian MS. 6258). In these manuscripts one is transported to an age older than ours, and yet in some ways so young that we have lost the magic key of it. For in them we read not only of herbs and the endless uses our forefathers made of them, but if we try and read them with understanding they open for us a magic casement through which we see the past bathed in a glamour of romance. We see “as through a glass darkly” a time when grown men believed in elves and goblins as naturally as they believed in trees, an age when it was the belief of everyday folk that the air was peopled with unseen powers of evil

against whose machinations definite remedies must be applied. Not only the stars of heaven, but springs of water and the simple wayside herbs were to them directly associated with unseen beings.

I propose to take first folk-lore connected with the origin of disease, then folk-lore connected with the curing of disease, ceremonies to be performed in the picking and administering of herbs, mystic power of earth, etc. I regret that it is impossible in a short paper to touch on the comparative folk-lore of this subject. The great bulk of the folk-lore connected with the origin of disease is probably of native Teutonic origin. It would be more correct to say of Indo-Germanic origin, for these doctrines are to be found among all Indo-Germanic peoples and even in the Vedas, notably the Atharva Veda.

#### *Beliefs in connection with the origin of disease.*

*The doctrine of the elf-shot.* The ancient Teutonic races believed that disease was due to supernatural beings whose shafts produced illness in their victims. All the Teutonic tribes believed that waste places,<sup>1</sup> and marshes in particular, were the resort of these mischievous beings. These elves were of many different kinds—mountain elves, wood elves, sea elves, water elves, etc. It is possible that the water elves were the personification of the unwholesome effects of marshy lands. These elves not only attacked people but also cattle, and references to elf-shot cattle are numerous.

It is interesting to find in the Leech Book of Bald a charm implying an effort to bury the elf in the earth. This is to be found at the end of the charm for a man “in the water-elf disease.” “If a man is in the water-elf disease then are the nails of his hand livid and the eyes tearful and he will look downwards. Give him this for leechdom

<sup>1</sup> Also a Babylonian belief. See Campbell Thompson, *Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia*.

a yewberry, lupin, wormwood. . . . Sing this charm over him twice—

‘ I have wreathed round the wound  
The best of healing wreaths  
That the baneful sores may  
Neither burn nor burst  
Nor find their way further,  
Nor turn foul and fallow,  
Nor thump and thole on  
Nor be wicked wounds  
Nor dig deeply down ;  
But he himself may hold  
In a way to health.  
Let it ache thee no more  
Than ear in Earth acheth.’

Sing also this many times : ‘ May earth bear on thee with all her might and main.’ ”

For horses and cattle suffering from “ elf-shot,” see Leech Book I. cap. 65 and 88.<sup>1</sup>

*Flying venom.* Closely allied to the belief in “ elf-shot ” is the belief in flying venom. It is, of course, possible to regard the phrase “ flying venoms ” as the graphic Anglo-Saxon way of describing infectious diseases, but the various synonymous phrases “ the on flying things,” “ the loathed things that rove through the land,” suggest something of more malignant activity. The idea of the wind blowing these venoms which produced diseases in the bodies on which they lighted is frequently found in Teutonic folk-lore. In the alliterative lay in the *Lacnunga* the wind is described as blowing these venoms from Woden’s magic twigs, and the evil effects are blown away by the magician’s song and the health-giving effects of salt and water and herbs. In the Leech Book I. 72, we find that these flying venoms were particularly malignant “ fifteen nights ere Lammas and

<sup>1</sup> For elf-shot, see also Leech Book I. cap. 64; II. cap. 65; III. 54, 61, 62, 63, 65.

after it for five and thirty nights." See also Leech Book I. cap. 72; Lacnunga, 6; Leech Book II. 64, 65. This doctrine of the flying venom finds its counterpart in a particular class of demon frequently mentioned in the Babylonian tablets, in one of which they are described as "the bitter venom of the gods."

*The worm as the ultimate source of disease.* Perhaps the most interesting feature in the elements of Teutonic folklore to be found in these manuscripts is the doctrine of the worm as the ultimate source of disease. The best example of this is in the alliterative lay in the Lacnunga. The opening lines describe the war between Woden (the supreme Teutonic god, the dispenser of victory, good health and prosperity) and the serpent. Disease arose from the nine fragments into which he smote the serpent, and these diseases blown by the wind are counteracted by the nine magic twigs and salt water and herbs, and the disease is again blown away from the victim.

Worms were regarded as the source of all disease, and we have this description of an internal malady: "at whiles worms from the nether parts seek the upper parts up as far as the maw, and they also work heart disease and oppressive sensations and swoonings so that sometimes some men by gnawing of the worms die and go to the dogs." In Lacnunga (95) there is a counting-out charm given which is said to be "medicine for thee from worm and from every mischief." The doctrine of the worm is also in Babylonian literature, and one incantation ends—"So must thou say this: 'O Worm may Ea smite thee with the might of his fist.'"<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that not only in Anglo-Saxon medicine but for many centuries afterwards toothache was ascribed to a worm in the tooth.

*Demoniac possession.* Side by side with the doctrines of the elf-shot and flying venom we have the ancient Eastern doctrine that disease is due to demoniac possession.

<sup>1</sup> *Cuneiform Texts*, part xvii. pl. 50.

Originally the exorcisms for this were heathen charms, but in the Leech Book Christian rites have to a large extent been substituted. Periwinkle was a herb endued with mysterious powers against demoniac possession. Mandrake was also held to be efficacious for the same purpose. See also Leech Book I. 62, 63 ; III. 64. Of Periwinkle we read in Herb. Ap. : " This wort is of good advantage for many purposes, that is to say first against devil sicknesses or demoniacal possessions, and against snakes and wild beasts and against poisons and for various wishes and for envy and for terror, and that thou may have grace and if thou hast the wort with thee thou shalt be prosperous and ever acceptable. This wort thou shalt pluck thus saying, I pray thee vinca pervinca, thou that art to be had for thy many useful qualities that thou come to me glad blossoming with thy mainfulness that thou outfit me so that I be shielded and ever prosperous and undamaged by poisons and by water ; when thou shalt pluck this thou shalt be clean by every uncleanness and thou shalt pick it when the moon is nine nights old and eleven nights and thirteen nights and thirty nights and when it is one night old." We find numerous other examples of herbs being used to cure demoniac possession. See Leech Book I. 63 ; Herb. Ap., 132 ; Leech Book III. 64.

*Temptations of the devil.* Quite distinct from the belief in demoniacal possession was the belief in the temptations of a personal devil. There are various herb drinks against the evil temptings of a fiend. See Leech Book II. 65 and Leech Book III. 41. In passing, it is curious to note how frequently typhus fever is associated with demoniac possession and temptations of the devil, *i.e.* the same herbs are used in the cures.

*Beliefs in connection with the curing of disease.*

*Smoking the patient with the fumes of herbs.* An interesting form of exorcism of the demon was that done by smoking

the patient with the fumes of burning herbs. This smoking with herbs is found also in the ancient Babylonian ritual. In an incantation against fever we find the instruction :

“ The sick man . . . thou shalt place  
 . . . thou shalt cover his face  
 Burn cypress and herbs . . .  
 That the great gods may remove the evil  
 That the evil spirit may stand aside

. . . . .  
 May a kindly spirit, a kindly genius be present.”

Asakki Marsuti. Tablet xi.

Instances of smoking with herbs.—“ Have a great quern stone baken or heated and laid under the man and have wall wort and brooklime and mugwort gathered and laid upon the stone and under it and apply cold water and make the steam reek up on the man as hot as he can endure it ” Lacnunga (48) ; cf. also Tobit VI. 7 ; Leech Book III. 62. “ Against elf disease put gledes in a glede pan and lay the worts on and reek the man with the worts before nine in the morning and at night and sing a litany, etc.” Of Smearwort (*aristolochia clematitis*) we read in the Herbarium Apuleius : “ If any child be vexed take thou the same wort and smoke him with this then thou wilt render it gladder.” Again, “ Take the same wort and dry it. Smoke the sick therewith ; it puts to flight devil sickness.” See also Leech Book II. 59. It is noteworthy that not only human beings but cattle and swine were to be smoked with the fumes of herbs. In Lacnunga 79, for sick cattle we find : “ Take the wort put it upon gledes and fenner and hassuck and cotton and incense. Burn all together on the side on which the wound is. Make it reek upon the cattle. Make five crosses of hassuck grass, set them on four sides of the cattle and one in the middle. Sing about the cattle Benedicam, etc., and the Benedicite and some litanies and the Paternoster. Sprinkle holy water upon them, burn about them incense and cotton and let some one set a value

on the cattle, let the owner give the tenth penny in the Church for God, after that leave them to amend ; do this thrice."

Lacnunga 82. "To preserve swine from sudden death sing over them four masses, drive the swine to the fold, hang the worts upon the four sides and upon the door, also burn them adding incense and make the reek stream over the swine." In this connection I should like to draw your attention to an account in the *Times* of 5th December, 1922, of smoking with herbs in order to cure a woman who was supposed to be possessed of a devil. This took place in the Lauenburg district of Pomerania.

*Charms.* Much interesting folk-lore is to be found in the charms for curing of disease, protection against evil, against snakes, etc. They may be roughly divided into material charms (*i.e.* herbs used as amulets), narrative charms, counting-out charms, magic or mystic sentences or words. For material charms see Herb. Ap. 66, 73, 74, 90, 96, 111, 114, 123, 132 ; Leech Book I. cap. 64 ; III. cap. 1, 2, 6, 53 ; Lacnunga, 88. The following may be quoted as examples of herbs used as amulets :

" If a mare or hag ride a man take lupins and garlic and betony and frankincense, bind them on a fawn's skin and let a man have the worts on him and let him go into his home." (Leech Book I. 64.)

" If any see some heavy mischief in his house let him take this wort Mandragoras into the middle of the house as much of it as he then may have by him ; he compelleth all evils out of the house." (Herb. Ap. 132.)

" For lunacy if a man layeth this wort peony over the lunatic as he lies, soon he upheaveth himself up whole and if he hath this wort into him the disease never again approaches him." (Herb. Ap. 66.)

" In case a woman suddenly turn dumb take penny royal and rub to dust, wind it up in wool, lay under the woman, it will soon be well with her." (Lacnunga 88.)

" If any one hath with him this wort (vervain) he may not be barked at by dogs." (Herb. Ap. 67.)

*Tying on the herbs with red wool.* In the use of herbs as amulets it is interesting to note in passing that there is frequently the instruction to bind on the herb with red yarn. Red is the colour sacred to Thor, and it is also the colour abhorred by the powers of evil. Sonny (*Arch. f. Rel.* 1906, p. 525), in his article "Rote Farbe im Totenkulte," considers the use of red to be in imitation of blood. Of examples of tying on herbs with red wool in the Saxon herbals the following will suffice :

" Clove wort (*ranunculus acris*) for a lunatic take this wort and wreath it with a red thread about the man's neck when the moon is on the wane in the month which is called April, soon he will be healed." (Herb. Ap.)

" In case a man ache in the head take the netherward part of crosswort, put it on a red fillet, let him bind the head therewith." (Leech Book III. 1.)

" For that ilk delve up waybroad without iron ere the rising of the sun and bind the roots about the head with crosswort by a red fillet, soon he will be well." (*Ibid.*)

*Hanging up of herbs.* Besides instructions for wearing herbs as amulets we also find instructions for hanging them up over doors, etc., for the benefit of not only human beings but cattle also. Of mugwort we read : " And if a root of this wort be hung over the door of any house then may not any man damage the house." (Herb. Ap.) Of croton oil plant for hail and rough weather to turn them away : " if thou hangest some seed of it in thine house or have it or its seed in any place whatever it turneth away the tempestuousness of hail." " Against temptation of the fiend a wort hight red violin, red stalk, it waxeth by running water if thou hast it on thee and under thy head and bolster and over thy house door the devil may not scathe thee within nor without." (Herb. Ap.)

"To preserve swine from sudden death hang the worts upon the four sides and upon the door." (Lacnunga 82.)

*Counting-out charms.* These are curiously interesting and, moreover, survive to this day in children's games. In Lacnunga we find this counting-out charm : " Nine were Nodes sisters, then the nine came to be eight and the eight seven and the seven six . . . and the one none. This may be medicine for thee from churnel and from scrofula and from worm and from every mischief."

The above closely resembles a Cornish charm for a tetter :

" Tetter tetter thou hast nine brothers,  
God bless the flesh and preserve the bone ;  
Perish thou tetter and be thou gone.

Tetter tetter thou hast eight brothers— "

Thus the verses are continued until tetter having " no brother " is ordered to be gone.<sup>1</sup>

*Narrative charms.* One of the lengthiest is for use when cattle have been lost (Lacnunga 91), but undoubtedly the most curious is the one for warts in the Lacnunga 56. " A charm to be sung first into the left ear then into the right, then above the man's head, and then the charm to be hung on his neck." There is a certain rough lilt about the lines in the original :

" Here came entering  
A spider wight  
He had his hands upon his hams  
He quoth that thou his hackney wert  
Lay thee against his neck  
They began to sail off the land  
As soon as they off the land came, then began they  
to cool  
Then came in a wild beast's sister

<sup>1</sup> R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England*, p. 414.

*Mystic sentences.* Many of these are quite incomprehensible, in others the names of heathen idols are mentioned, in others they are a string of words which some authorities suggest are corrupt Irish, others are in corrupt Latin, others mere letters. “ In case a man or beast drink an insect if it be of male kind sing this lay in the right ear which lay is hereinafter written ; if it be of female kind sing it in the left ear. Gonomil, orgomil, marbumil, marbsai, ramum, tofeth, etc. (Lacnunga 9.) Dr. J. F. Pague, who quotes this in *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times*, says, “ Dr. Bradley informs me that the words are corrupt Irish, but are not consecutively intelligible.”

"For a woman who cannot rear her child . . . say 'Everywhere I carried for me the famous kindred doughty one with this famous meat doughty one so I will have it for me and go home.' " (Lacnunga 104.)

"Sing this for toothache after the sun hath gone down, Caio laio, voaque ofer saelo, ficia, etc., then name the man and his father, then say Lilumenne, it acheth beyond everything, when it lieth low it cooleth, when on earth it burneth hottest finit. Amen." (Lacnunga 8.)

"Write this along the arms for convulsions or against a dwarf three crosses, T for the Trinity and Alpha and Omega, and rub down celandine into ale, S. Machutus, St. Victorius. Write this along the arm as protection against a dwarf  $+\xi+\rho+\xi+N+\omega+m$ , etc., and powder celandine into ale." (Lacnunga, 51.)

*Uttering a charm to the four cardinal points.* We occasionally find instructions to utter the charm to the four cardinal points successively. (This is to be found also in the Atharva Veda.) "For flying venom smite four strokes towards the

four quarters with an oaken brand, make the brand bloody, throw away, sing this thrice :

Matthew leads me  
Mark preserves me  
Luke frees me  
John aids me.

If ale be spoilt then take lupins, lay them on the four quarters of the dwelling and over the door and under the threshold and under the ale vat, put the wort into ale with holy water." (Leech Book 67.)

In using the charm to bring back stolen cattle it is ordered to be followed by saying, " May the cross of Christ bring me back my beasts from the East " thrice, then to the West thrice, then to the South thrice, and then to the North thrice." (Lacnunga 91.)

*Transferring the illness to some other object.* This is not only of very ancient origin, but until recent times (*i.e.* the close of the last century) and even now in very remote parts this belief persisted in this country. In the Saxon manuscripts we find the following instances :—

" For bite of hunting spider strike five scarifications one on the bite and four round about it, throw the blood with a spoon silently over a wagon way." (Leech Book I. 68.)

" If a man eat wolf's bone, let him stand upon his head, let some one strike him many scarifications on the shanks, then the venom departs out through the incisions." (Leech Book I. 84.)

In the salve against the " elfin race and nocturnal goblin visitors " it is directed that the salve made of herbs, sheep's grease and butter and holy salt is to be thrown into running water. (Leech Book III. 61.) Vervain. " For mad hound's bite take the same root (vervain) and wheaten corns whole and lay to the wounds till that the corns are nesched through the wet and so are swollen up. Take then the corns and cast them to some cock or hen fowl." (Herb. Ap.)

*Mystic power of Nine.* Numbers play a conspicuous part in these early manuscripts on herbs, and particularly the number nine. In the alliterative lay of the nine healing herbs this is very conspicuous. Woden, we are told, smote the serpent into nine magic twigs, the serpent was broken into nine parts from which the wind blew the nine flying venoms. In the herbal prescriptions the mystic number nine appears continually. There are numerous instances of the patient being directed to take the herb potion for nine days.

“Sowbread. For sore of spleen take juice of this wort for nine days. Thou wilt wonder at the benefit.”  
(Herb. Ap.)

“Knot grass. In case that a man spew blood take juice of this wort and boil it without smoke in very good and strong wine; let (the sick man) drink it then fasting for nine days, within the period of which thou wilt perceive a wondrous thing.” (Herb. Ap.) In the prescription given by the leech Oxa it is ordered, “let the man drink for nine days.” Or the patient is directed to take nine portions of the different ingredients.

“Hop trefoil. For sore of inwards take leaves of this wort, its twigs are as swine bristles, pound then the leaves and nine peppercorns and nine grains of coriander seed.”  
(Herb. Ap.)

“Against blains, take nine eggs and boil them hard and take the yolks and throw the white away and grease the yolks in a pan and wring out the liquor through a cloth, and take as many drops of wine as there are of the eggs and as many drops of unhallowed oil and as many drops of honey and from a root of fennel as many drops, then take, etc.” (Herb. Ap., Fly leaf leechdoms.) See also Herb. Ap. 117; Leech Book I. 33, 64, 67, 83, and II. 7, 65.

*Ceremonies in picking and administering herbs.* These are numerous, and are a curious mixture of heathen rites (mostly Sun-worship) and Christian rites. In some there

is the instruction that the herb is to be gathered "without use of iron" or "with gold and with harts horn" (emblems of the sun's rays); in many cases the herb is to be gathered before the sun's uprising, in nearly all certain mystic words are to be addressed to the herb, and in at least one case offerings are to be made to it. In some the herbs are to be gathered at sunrise or "when day and night divide." In many cases masses have to be sung over the herbs before they are administered to the patient. In some cases the herbs are to be gathered in silence; in others the man who gathers them is not to look behind him. This prohibition against looking backwards recurs frequently in ancient superstitions.<sup>1</sup> In some cases it is ordered that the man who gathers the herb is to think of the patient when he does so; in others to name the disease. In a charm for toothache we find the old Roman belief of naming the patient and his father. In some cases certain prayers are to be said when the herbs are administered, and in others this is combined with the old heathen rite of looking towards the East or turning "with the Sun." I quote the following examples:

"For rent by snake take this same wort and ere thou carve it off hold it in thine hand and say thrice nine times, 'Omnes malas bestias canto,' that is in our language, 'Enchant and overcome all evil wild animals,' then carve it off with a very sharp knife into three parts. And the while that thou be doing this think of the man whom thou thinkest to leech and when thou wend thence look not about thee, then take the wort and pound it, lay it to the cut, soon it will be whole." (Leech Book I. 46.)

In the leechdom for "dry diseases"—"let him in the morning drink a cup full of this drink; in the middle of the morning hours let him stand towards the East, let him address himself to God earnestly and let him sign himself

<sup>1</sup> See Sir J. Frazer's *Golden Bough*, iii. 104; also "Fore-lore of Mos-soul," *P.S.B.A.* 1906, 79.

with the sign of the cross, let him also turn himself about as the sun goeth from East to South and West." (Leech Book I. 47.)

" Let him who will take it (adderwort) cleanse himself and let him inscribe it with gold and silver and with harts horn and with ivory and with bear's tusk and with bull's horn and let him lay thereabout fruits sweetened with honey. If anyone be in such infirmity, that he be choice (in eating) then mayest thou unbind him. Take of this wort lion foot . . . let him not look behind him."

*The mystic power of Earth.* Earth, of course, has always had a mystic power, and much of this old belief still remains amongst country people. In one of the Anglo-Saxon MS. herbals (MS. Harley 1585) we find this prayer, of which there is only space to quote part of Dr. Charles Singer's translation.

" Earth divine goddess Mother Nature who generatest all things and bringest forth anew the Sun which thou hast given to the nations . . . Goddess ! I adore thee as divine ; I call upon thy name . . . whatsoever herb thy power dost produce, give I pray thee with good will to all nations to save them and grant me this my medicine."

Between the Saxon manuscripts on herbs and the first printed herbals there is a great gulf fixed. It is true that there are in the British Museum and other libraries manuscript herbals, but the majority of these are of little interest to the student of folk-lore. Amongst these MSS. there is one, however, to which reference should be made, for it contains a piece of folk-lore which is, I believe, still current in England. This MS. is one sent by the "Countess of Henawd" to her daughter Philippa, Queen of England, and in it there is recorded that rosemary " passeth not commonly in highte the highte of Criste whill he was man in Erthe," and that when the plant attains thirty-three years in age it will increase in breadth but not in height.

*Folk-lore in the early printed herbals.* In the first printed herbals we find the old Anglo-Saxon belief in the efficacy of herbs against the unseen powers of evil in a new phase, namely, that herbs may be used to promote happiness and to make men "merry and joyfull." This, of course, is one of the most conspicuous features of the famous later herbals of Gerard and Parkinson. We find also in these early herbals that the belief in the use of herbs as amulets remains unaltered. Of herbs used as charms in the first printed herbals, see in Banckes' *Herbal Artemisia*, asterion, hare's lettuce, peony, plantain, vervain. The following belief in connection with vervain is not to be found in any other English herbal. "Thei that beare vervaine upon them they shall have love of great maysters and they shal graūt him his asking if his asking be good and rightfull." For herbs used "to comfort the heart," etc., see wormwood, borage, lang de befe. We come next to *The Grete Herball*, and here we find again instances of the use of herbs for their effect on the mind, also instances of smoking a patient with the fumes of herbs. (See artemisia, rosemary, southernwood.) It is in the *Grete Herball* that we find the first avowal of disbelief in the supposed powers of mandrake. The widespread old belief in the efficacy of 'mummy' "bryghte blacke stynkyng and styffe" which grows on dead bodies, is given with the usual gruesome illustration. In Turner's herbal there is singularly little folk-lore beyond that to be found in Banckes and the *Grete Herball*. One should note, however, that this is the first herbal in which any account is to be found of the old custom of curing disease in cattle by boring a hole in the ear and inserting the herb bearfoot, "then all the mighte and pestilent poison of the disease is brought so into the eare. And whilse the part which is circled aboute dyeth and falleth awaye yt hole beast is saved with the lose of a very smal parte." See also bearfoot in Parkinson's *Theatrum Botanicum*.

*Folk-lore of Gerard's "Herball."* Even the most cursory reading of Gerard's *Herball* brings home to one how much we lose by the lack of the old simple belief in the efficacy of herbs, to cure not only physical ills but also the mind and even the heart. This belief was shared by the greatest civilizations of antiquity, and it is only we foolish moderns who ignore the fact that "very wonderful effects may be wrought by the Virtues, which are enveloped within the compasse of the Green Mantles wherewith many Plants are adorned." Doctors are cautious folk nowadays, and it is wonderful to think of a time when the world was so young that people were brave and hopeful enough to imagine that they could cure or even alleviate another's sorrow. If ever anything so closely approaching the miraculous is attempted again, one feels sure that we shall turn as the wise men of the oldest civilizations did to God's most beautiful creatures to accomplish the miracle. In common with the majority of the old herbalists Gerard's faith in herbs was simple and unquestioning. Sweet marjoram, he tells us, is for those "who are given to over-much sighing." Again, "The smell of Basil is good for the heart . . . it taketh away sorrowfulness which commeth of melancholy and maketh a man merry and glad." "Bawme comforts the heart and driveth away all melancholy and sadness ; it makes the heart merry and joyfull and strengtheneth the vitall spirits." Of the despised dead nettle he tells us that "the flowers baked with sugar, as roses are, maketh the vitall spirits more fresh and lively." Of borage, he quotes the well-known old couplet :

I Borage  
Bring alwaies Courage.

It is impossible to quote a tithe of what Gerard writes in this connection. But see also under buglos, rosemary, meadowsweet, vervain, water-mint, etc.

One well-known piece of folk-lore to be found in Gerard

requires more than mere passing notice—the myth of the barnacle geese. This is at least as old as the twelfth century. It appeared for the next two centuries in two forms—one that trees growing near the sea produced fruit like apples, each containing the embryo of a goose, which, when the fruit was ripe, fell into the water and flew away. In the other the geese were supposed to emanate from a fungus growing on rotting timber floating at sea. (It is the myth in the latter form which Gerard gives.) One of the earliest mentions of this myth is to be found in Giraldus Cambrensis (*Topographia Hiberniae*, 1187), a zealous reformer of Church abuses. In his protest against eating these barnacle geese during Lent, he writes thus : “ There are here many birds which are called Bernacae which Nature produces in a manner contrary to nature and very wonderful. They are like marsh geese but smaller. They are produced from fir-timber tossed about at sea, and are at first like geese upon it. Afterwards they hang down by their beaks as if from a sea-weed attached to the wood and are enclosed in shells that they may grow the more freely. Having thus in course of time been clothed with a strong covering of feathers, they either fall into the water or seek their liberty in the air by flight. The embryo geese derive their growth and nutriment from the moisture of the wood or of the sea, in a secret and most marvellous manner. I have seen with my own eyes more than a thousand minute bodies of these birds hanging from one piece of timber on the shore, enclosed in shells and already formed . . . in no corner of the world have they been known to build a nest. Hence the bishops and clergy in some parts of Ireland are in the habit of partaking of these birds on fast days without scruple. But in doing so they are led into sin, for if any one were to eat the leg of our first parent, although he (Adam) was not born of flesh, that person could not be adjudged innocent of eating flesh.” Jews in the Middle Ages were divided whether these barnacle geese should be killed as

flesh or fish. Pope Innocent III. took the view that they were flesh, for at the Lateran Council in 1215 he prohibited the eating of barnacle geese during Lent. In 1277 Rabbi Izaak of Corbeil forbade them altogether to Jews on the ground that they were neither fish nor flesh. Various localities were supposed to be the breeding places of these arboreal geese. Gervasius of Tilbury (1211) says that they grew on the willows near the abbey of Faversham, and that the bird there was called *Barneta*. The Scottish historian Boece did not believe in them. In his work (1527), translated into Scottish in 1540 by John Bellenden, Arch-deacon of Murray, he arrives at the conclusion that "the nature of the seis is mair relevant caus of their procreation than any other thyng." They were believed to exist on the shores of the Baltic (see Vincentius Bellovacensis (1190-1264) in *Speculum Naturae*), and in Flanders (see Jacob de Vitriaco, who died 1244).

Pope Pius II. when he was on a visit to James I. of Scotland was most anxious to see these geese, but he was told that they could only be seen in the Orkney Islands. Sebastian Munster,<sup>1</sup> who relates the foregoing, evidently believed in the myth himself, for he wrote of them : "In Scotland there are trees which produce fruit conglomerated of leaves and this fruit when in due time it falls into the water beneath it is endowed with new life and is converted into a living bird which they call the 'tree goose.' . . . Several old cosmographers, especially Saxo Grammaticus, mention the tree and it must not be regarded as fictitious as some new writers suppose." Even as early as the thirteenth century both Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon derided the myth. But in the centuries that followed it seems to have been accepted with unquestioning faith, with the notable exception of the Scottish historian Boece. Coming to later times we find that Gaspar Schott (*Physica Curiosa sive Mirabilia Naturae et Artis*, 1662, lib. ix. cap.

<sup>1</sup> *Cosmographia Universalis*, p. 49. 1572.

xxii. p. 960) quotes a vast number of authorities on this old myth, and gives his opinion that it was absurd. Yet in 1677 Sir Robert Moray read before the Royal Society "A Relation concerning Barnacles," and this was published in the *Philosophical Transactions*, Jan. and Feb. 1677-8.

*The Folk-lore in Parkinson's "Theatrum Botanicum."* The folk-lore to be found in Parkinson is so interesting that it is impossible to deal with it in a short space. Of herbs used as amulets one notes mistletoe to be hung round children's necks as a protection against witchcraft; bears-foot to be put in a hole cut in the dewlap of an ox to cure cough; soap made from glasswort to be spread on "thick coarse brown paper cut into the forme of their shooe soles" for those that are "casually taken speechless"; "plantain roots for ague; loosestrife to be fastened to the yokes to take away strife between oxen; periwinkle wreathed round the legs against cramp," etc. We find also instances of the old belief in the efficacy of herbs to promote happiness and to destroy melancholy (see oak galls, vipers, bugloss, borage, etc.); herbs to be used against witchcraft, notably Herb true love, and one—the Indian Spanish counterpoison—which "taken in white wine resisteth witchery that is used in such drinke that are given to produce love." Herbs to be used also against forgetfulness (see sage and asarabacca), and curious old beliefs connected with bee-lore (balm which is beneficial to them and woad, of which he says, "it hath been observed that Bees have dyed of as it were of a Flix that have tasted hereof"). Also some curious old gardening beliefs not found in other herbals but very frequently in contemporary books on gardening, husbandry, etc., notably the writings of Thomas Hill. (For gardening beliefs see Parkinson's *Theatrum Botanicum*; see especially under gourds, great spurge, asparagus and elder.) The most interesting piece of folk-lore to be found in Parkinson is the myth of the vegetable lamb of Tartary. This "lamb,"

growing on a stalk and eating the herbage, is one of the figures on the frontispiece of his *Paradisi*.

This was one of the most curious myths of the Middle Ages. It was also known as the Scythian Lamb and the Borametz or Barometz, the latter being derived from a Tartar word signifying "lamb." This "lamb" was supposed to be both a true animal and a living plant, and was supposed to grow in the territory of the Tartars of the East formerly called Scythia. According to some writers the lamb was the fruit of a tree, and when the fruit or seed pod of this tree was fully ripe it burst open and disclosed a little lamb perfect in every way. This was Sir John Mandeville's version. Other writers described the lamb as being suspended above the ground by a stalk, flexible enough to allow the animal to feed on the herbage within its reach. When it had consumed all within its reach the stem withered and the lamb died. It was further reported that this lamb was a favourite food with wolves, but that no other carnivorous animals would attack it. So far as is known the story was first treated of in an English book by Sir John Mandeville, "the Knyght of Ingelond that was y bore in the town of Seynt Albans and travelide aboute in the worlde in many diverse countreis to se mervailes and customs of countreis and diversiteis of fo.kys and diverse shap of men and of beistis." It is in the chapter describing the curiosities he met with in the dominions of the "Cham" of Tartary that the passage about the Vegetable Lamb occurs. References to the Vegetable Lamb are also to be found in *Histoire admirable des Plantes* (1605) by Charles Duret, in *The Journall of Frier Odoricus of Friuli* in Hakluyt's *Voyages*, in *De Spontaneis Viventum Ortu* (1518) by Fortunio Liceti, Professor of Philosophy at Padua, in *Historia Naturae* by Juan Ensebio Nieremberg, in *De Rerum Natura* (1557) by Cardano of Pavia, in *Exotericarum Exercitationum* by Julius Scaliger. Saluste, the Sieur du Bartas, in his poem *La Semaine* (1578) described the Vegetable Lamb as

one of the wonders in the Garden of Eden. After the middle of the seventeenth century very little belief in "The Vegetable Lamb" remained amongst men of letters, but it continued to be a subject of discussion for at least another 150 years. The origin of this extraordinary myth is undoubtedly to be found in the ancient descriptions of the cotton plant. See Herodotus (lib. III. cap. 106); Strabo (lib. xv. cap. 21); Theophrastus *De Historia Plantarum* (lib. iv. cap. 4); Pomponius Mela, *De Situ Orbis* (lib. iii. cap. 7); and Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*.

*Seventeenth century astrological beliefs.* Culpepper and Coles are the most noteworthy authors in whose writings we find the ancient astrological beliefs in their most degraded form. The instances in Culpepper are too numerous to quote, as they are to be found on every page.

Coles, however, treats with scorn and by arguments peculiarly his own the old belief in the connections between the stars and herbs. "It (the study of herbs) is a subject as antient as the Creation, yea more antient than the Sunne or the Moon, or Starres, they being created on the fourth day, whereas Plants were the third. Thus did God even at first confute the folly of those Astrologers who goe about to maintaine that all vegetables in their growth are enslaved to a necessary and unavoidable dependance on the influences of the Starres; whereas Plants were even when Planets were not." In another passage, however, he writes, "Though I admit not of Master Culpepper's Astrologicall way of every Planet's Dominion over Plants yet I conceive that the Sunne and Moon have generall influence upon them, the one for Heat the other for Moisture; wherein the being of Plants consists." The doctrine of signatures Coles accepts unquestioningly: "Though Sin and Sathan have plunged mankinde into an Ocean of infirmities yet the mercy of God which is over all his Workes maketh Grasse to grow up on the Mountains and Herbs for the Use of Men and hath not only stamped upon them (as upon every man)

a distinct forme but also given them particular signatures whereby a Man may read even in legible characters the use of them." He gives amongst other instances of the doctrine of signatures the walnut, which resembles the human head (the kernels like the brains, etc.). In regard to plants which have no signatures, he intimates that this is to provide a fit subject of study for mankind, "for Man was not brought into the World to live like an idle Loyterer or Truant but to exercise his Minde."

It is easy to pour scorn on the credulity of the seventeenth century herbalists who were the exponents of a depraved astrological lore. But signs are not wanting that we are possibly on the eve of a revival of this old teaching, and, apart from its scientific aspect, surely there are very few flower-lovers who do not connect flowers and stars. Do not flowers seem to reflect in microscopic form those glorious flowers which deck the firmament of heaven? There is something so star-like in many flowers that almost involuntarily one's mind connects them with the luminaries in the expanse above us, and from this it is but a short step to the belief that there is between them a secret communion which is past our understanding. Mystics of all ages and all civilizations have felt the existence of this secret understanding between what are surely the most beautiful of God's creations—flowers and stars—and the fascination is in no small part due to the exquisite frailty and short-lived beauty of the flowers of earth and the stupendous majesty of the flowers in the heavens, those myriad worlds in whose existence a thousand years is but a passing dream.

ELEANOUR SINCLAIR ROHDE.

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